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## ABSTRACT

This booklet provides sample strategies to ameliorate service delivery problems commonly encountered by rural special educators. Strategies to increase acceptance of disabled students by nondisabled peers include buddy systems and class activities that promote personal interaction, simulation activities, and social and personal skills development. Strategies to develop support for special education programs among regular education personnel and in the community employ integrative activities in school and community and effective use of communication networks and informal organizational structures. Strategies to enhance instruction cover teacher cooperation and consultation, innovative variations on placement in the least restrictive environment, provision of special services on a voluntary basis where space is available, and vocational programming and placement in the community. Strategies for transporting students or service providers include integrating special education with regular education transportation, sharing transportation services with other agencies, using volunteers, clustering students for cost efficiency, using travel time for instruction, and using technology to provide distance education. Strategies to supplement inadequate numbers of special education staff employ role changes, staff sharing, and professional and nonprofessional volunteers. Other strategies address staffing models, use of advanced technologies, cooperative approaches, personnel retention, staff development, fund raising, and parent involvement. (SV)

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SAMPLE STRATEGIES USED TO SERVE RURAL STUDENTS  
IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

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## SAMPLE STRATEGIES USED TO SERVE RURAL STUDENTS IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

The primary barriers to serving rural students in the Least Restrictive Environment are costs; staff shortages; inadequate secondary programming alternatives; community attitudes (e.g., limited expectations regarding achievement of those with disabilities; lack of understanding of the difference between integration and mainstreaming, etc.); the "mystification" of special education; transportation difficulties; remote locations and sparse populations contributing to the inability to cluster students for service delivery; inadequate facilities, equipment, and materials; and lack of involvement of parents located in remote areas. These are fully described in the ACRES publications, "Models for Serving Rural Students in the Least Restrictive Environment" and "The State of the Art of Rural Special Education."

The "Models" article describes a number of models of serving rural students with low-incidence disabilities. Models of service delivery are not necessarily "pure" or discrete. For example, in any given day, resource room teachers frequently serve as consulting teachers and self-contained classroom teachers frequently serve as resource room teachers. Each model must be altered to "fit" the characteristics of a particular rural community and school system (See Figure 2 in the "Models" article).

Examples of how you can vary each model are described in the following strategy pages. Additional research is needed to determine the most appropriate communities in which to use particular strategies.

Some potential strategies conflict with others. For example, the strategy of initially mainstreaming all children with severe emotional disturbances is diametrically opposed to the strategy of placing all students in self-contained classrooms until they have demonstrated their abilities to learn in a regular class environment.

The American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) has compiled a considerable amount of research data related to solving these problems. Questions that are commonly asked by rural service providers are addressed in the attached sample strategies used to ameliorate service delivery problems. For additional information regarding specific problem areas, contact ACRES.

## INCREASING ACCEPTANCE/INTEGRATION OF DISABLED STUDENTS

### Interaction

- \* Involve nondisabled students in classes for students with disabilities.

This would include the use of peer tutors and special friends or "buddies."

Peer tutors are nondisabled peers who model appropriate speech or social skills and help the disabled student practice appropriate skills. Many rural schools have involved National Honor Society students, Student Council students, or other school leaders so that this practice is readily accepted and implemented. Rural schools have also involved nondisabled students as peer tutors for academic credit. For example, students enrolled in home economic or child development classes have assisted with physical/occupational therapy follow through, psychology students have been involved in special projects in which they learn more about disabilities and different learning styles, and vocational students have the opportunity to learn responsibilities which will apply to any later work situation. Students have been encouraged to gain the personal benefits of extra skills practice and have been recognized for their increased responsibilities.

A "buddy system" is a system of support for the disabled student. A "buddy" is a nondisabled special friend who participates with his disabled buddy in lunch, assemblies, recess, or other school and social activities. He may also share a locker with his buddy.

- \* Plan to integrate severely handicapped students, whenever possible into regular music, art, and physical education classes, study halls, and home rooms.
- \* Plan as much social integration of severely handicapped students as possible through involvement of disabled students in extracurricular and non-academic activities ranging from school assemblies to playground activities.
- \* Plan joint field trips of self-contained special education classes and regular classes.
- \* Structure responsibilities for disabled students similar to those of their nondisabled peers. Jobs would include office helper, attendance monitor and cafeteria helper.
- \* Educate nondisabled students concerning ways in which severely handicapped students can participate in noncompetitive school projects such as decorating for school dances, creating art projects, serving as a pep club member, and assisting in selection of pictures to be included in the school yearbook.
- \* Investigate the cost effectiveness of eliminating tuition fees for distant residential or private school placement of severely handicapped students who have been "tuitioned out" versus receiving services within the district.

- \* Hold discussions with nondisabled students before students with disabilities are integrated. Discuss their differences and similarities. Encourage students to touch or experience special equipment, ride in wheelchairs, and otherwise begin to become familiar with differences.
- \* Establish a "Special Friends Program" to create opportunities for nondisabled students to ask questions and share feelings about their experiences with students with disabilities.
- \* Integrate follow-through activities necessary after speech, occupational or physical therapy with course credit for students enrolled in home economics, child development or other related courses.
- \* Include local day care centers in individualized programming. (E.g., preschool children who need opportunities to socialize with nondisabled peers can be enrolled in the preschool handicapped program as well as the local day care center.) They can attend a half-day public school program for the developmentally delayed and the other half day can be spent at the local day care center. The preschool teacher assumes responsibility for planning the coordination of each child's developmental goals for both programs.

#### Simulation

- \* Have a day or weekend in which nondisabled students become "disabled for a day" and then discuss their feelings and the way in which the community responded to their needs. Have a pin-on button or other icon that students give to those who exhibit appropriate responses to their disability.
- \* Initiate Individualized Education Plans for all children. (The individualized plans for nondisabled children would not need to meet the requirements for special education IEPs). Staff and parental involvement in the design of the plans would assist in the understanding of the needs of handicapped children.

#### Cooperation

- \* Work out agreements between public school itinerant teachers and day care center staff so that educators have opportunities to work closely with other agencies, and foster greater interagency effort toward individualized programming for preschoolers with disabilities.

#### Focusing on Social and Personal Skills Development

- \* A five-day training camp can be offered periodically to focus on social and personal skill development of the students. The camp can be offered from Thursday through Monday. Large and small group activities can be planned along with individual work or communication skills, personal hygiene, job interviewing, values clarification, etc. These can be conducted along with regular camp activities such as canoeing and backpacking. Camp staff could be hired or borrowed from collaborating agencies and neighboring districts. Follow-up group meetings can be conducted with students throughout the school year.

## DEVELOPING SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

### Social Integration

- \* It is helpful to make special education classrooms (especially resource rooms) gathering places for teachers (perhaps at first by offering coffee next to indices of learning materials appropriate for nonhandicapped children). Special educators can also help regular educators overcome some of the anxiety attached to attempting to work with special education children by placing attractive noticeable posters that deal with exactly what teaching materials--including definite page numbers in various texts--are helpful to regular class teachers attempting to work with children with particular problems. Informal and later formal interactions can take place in the special educator's room which center on demonstrations of techniques, media, other equipment, etc. Soon the efficient "rural grapevine," one of rural America's most effective resources, will be doing this job for the special educator.
- \* Understand the importance of special educators being viewed as an integral part of the rural community and the regular education program. Special educators attain greater credibility when they are viewed as "insiders." For example, special educators who have voluntarily ushered for regular education assemblies have few problems finding volunteers to build equipment for their handicapped students or to help with special field trips. Their suggestions to regular educators are more positively received than those of special education teachers or itinerant personnel who are viewed as involved with or knowledgeable only about special education.
- \* Special educators who become involved in community activities, ranging from churches and civic activities to informal gatherings at the local cafe, also experience less stress. Involvement in noneducation activities helps establish a support system that can be depended upon to assist with personal and job-related stresses.

### Communication

- \* Identify and use the power and communication systems that exist in the community. Informal organizational structures and lines of communication are usually more powerful in rural America than those that are formally outlined. These systems can assist you in obtaining the results you are seeking to enhance rural special education services.
- \* Formal follow-up systems can be established once rapport has been established. For example, the resource room teacher can establish a formal communication channel by instituting a monthly status report of student progress. To ensure reciprocal communication, a feedback sheet can be attached to the report. This process offers opportunities for responding to the concerns of the classroom teacher (logistical concerns as well as relevancy of instruction in the resource room).
- \* Break down traditional barriers in structured interactions between school personnel. Teacher exchanges and part-time assignments of special education personnel to resource positions have been found particularly effective.

tive. A formal data base or a more informal system may be used to initiate temporary exchanges of regular and special education personnel. Exchanging positions promotes understanding of personnel roles and creates positive attitudes.

#### Exchange of Techniques

- \* It is helpful to incorporate implications for nondisabled students of techniques regular educators are being asked to use with disabled students. E.g., a teacher can be trained to use task analysis with nondisabled students before he or she uses it with disabled students. Give the teacher time to practice applied behavioral analysis (a new behavior) with a nondisabled student before encouraging them to feel comfortable with using this concept with a disabled child (a new attitude).
- \* Arrange for special education students to transport special education techniques back to the regular classroom so that they can be used there and seen as valuable to regular classroom teachers ( An example includes a special educator taping eleventh grade science materials for a student who cannot read them but is responsible for their mastery.)

## ENHANCING INSTRUCTION

### Teacher Consultation

- \* Special education personnel can unobtrusively visit regular classrooms and observe or participate in the mainstreaming of a student with a mild or moderate disability. A special educator or therapist can offer consultation to the regular class teacher and prepare materials to be introduced by him/her in the mainstreamed situation. A special educator can also work with a small group of students, including the mainstreamed child. Assignments can be individualized within the group. Therapeutic services can also be offered in this manner.

### Classroom Assistance

- \* Consider use of the "integrated therapy" model in which therapists and teachers work together to integrate physical and occupational therapy into the classroom curriculum. Therapists train and consult with teachers to enable them to provide needed services. This facilitates integration by avoiding the "pull-out" model.

### Placement

- \* Interpret the "least restrictive environment" mandates of PL 94-142 requirements, whenever possible, to mean regular classroom settings. For example, the school system in Douglas County, Nevada places even the most severely emotionally disturbed children in the regular classroom whenever possible. A special educator monitors the student's performance in mainstreamed classes and is prepared to immediately provide assistance as needed. If a student still has difficulty operating within this environment, he is immediately taken back to the segregated classroom where the special education aide is working. The thrust of the program is nonpunitive and is designed so that the student does not perceive himself as needing special help or being unusual. This is facilitated by an emphasis on the fact that a vast majority of students are engaged in various types of pull-out programs (e.g., programs for the academically talented, special music programs, adapted physical education, etc.). Thus, pulling a child out for short periods of time and having him return to the segregated classroom does not give the impression that the child is having difficulty.
- \* Initiate a cooperative (centrally located) classroom for low-incidence behaviorally disordered students. Implement classroom objectives, including the improvement of classroom behavior and academic remediation, using behavior modification principles. After appropriate behavior changes have been observed in the special classroom, provide special education students with opportunities to demonstrate acceptable behavior in the regular classroom. If the student is unsuccessful in the regular classroom, following behavior modification in the centrally located special classroom, the student should be re-enrolled in the special classroom.
- \* Establish an alternative classroom for secondary behaviorally disordered students in a centrally located area. Re-integrate students into the mainstream after successful attendance at the alternative school and after multidisciplinary individual education plan meetings are attended by the principal and teachers of the home school.

- \* Establish an open classroom for emotionally handicapped secondary students. Employ democratic methods to identify and solve problems, encouraging emotionally handicapped students to acquire skills in self-governance, decision making, self-regulation and responsibility taking. The special educator should serve as a counselor, advisor, and resource person.
- \* Deaf-blind children can be placed in classes for the students with severe handicaps. Through cooperative efforts, special education teachers and aides can receive assistance from state department or intermediate unit consultants in the area of deaf-blind. The consultant can visit the program on a regular basis to assess student progress, suggest remediation strategies, and provide access to materials. In addition, regular junior high students can serve as peer tutors under the supervision of the special education classroom teacher and aide. The deaf-blind student can, with the assistance of other students, ride the regular school bus.
- \* A comprehensive self-contained class can be established to meet the needs of severely handicapped students. Staff can include a special educator and aides. By providing educational services within the local district, students can be served in the least restrictive environment close to their own residence.
- \* A shop, vocational, or industrial arts program can be developed which will help to accommodate students with handicapping conditions. The program can be based on a learning center concept, and students can elect the areas in which they wish to work. Instructors can provide guidance through the learning center activities, rather than lecture. Instruction can consist of direct instruction and of independent work. Student pace through the curricula can be individualized. Because work is individualized for all students, this is an excellent mainstreaming program.
- \* An elementary classroom for students with behavior problems can be staffed with a teacher and an aide. The thrust of the program can be to enable the child with behavior problems to spend increasing amounts of time in the regular education program. The teacher can plan the instructional program for the students who are assigned to her class at a given time. While the aide implements these activities, the teacher may be in a regular education class which has another one of her students. While she is in the classroom, she can obtain information on the functional level of the student and develop management systems that are consistent with those in use in the special education program and that will facilitate mainstreaming.
- \* Behaviorally disordered students can be programmed through a teacher of students with mild academic problems. These students can be an addition to her caseload of students with learning problems. An aide can be sent to a regional residential program to learn the skills in behavior management used in that facility. The resource teacher can be responsible for designing the academic activities in the classroom, and the aide can manage the behavioral component. The program initially involves considerable isolation of the students, but they can be gradually programmed into less restrictive settings as behavior problems become more controlled.

- \* Offer specialized services via an itinerant staff member or mobile van.

#### Providing Secondary Programming

- \* Establish a secondary resource program to serve two different groups of students. The first group will be students who have been identified as eligible for special education services and for whom an individualized educational program is in place. Services will be delivered to this population of students on a priority basis and in conformity with the plan. The second group of students will be composed of those who request assistance on a voluntary basis. They will be accepted on a space-available basis. Students in advanced courses who are having temporary difficulties will occasionally be found in this resource room.
- \* Plan activities that teach practical vocational and community living skills directly in the community. For example, rather than using a "token economy" system and using play money and empty food containers in the classroom for a simulated store, arrange field trips in which disabled students actually grocery shop in the community. This will lessen the degree to which the severely handicapped students must generalize what he is learning. Possible integration sites include shopping centers, restaurants, grocery stores, public transportation facilities, libraries, family work settings, and public parks. Encourage student interaction with police officers, bus drivers, shopkeepers, public service employees, and waiters.

#### Vocational Programming

- \* School-business partnerships can result in unique vocational training opportunities. For example, the area Chamber of Commerce and associated businesses can "Adopt A School" and compete to see which business offers the most innovative program resources. These could vary from shadowing/internships or facility tours to setting up enclaves of supported employment for individuals with severe disabilities. Incentives for businesses include tax deductions and "goodwill" emerging from sharing of computer equipment or time, or personnel, donations of materials, etc.
- \* In rural communities with little or no employment potential for nondisabled or disabled citizens, a group of community citizens including representatives of businesses, social agencies, and civic clubs can be formed. A local leader (e.g., chair of the Welcome Wagon or Garden Club) can solicit opinions regarding ways integrated employment can be "created" by local citizens. Successful applications of this strategy have included a resort community designing a job which involved a local disabled citizen making fishing lures and selling them in the country store; another community bought a paragraver (modified dental drill) so that a disabled adolescent could "take orders" in response to jobs created by local citizens (e.g., decoration of steel helmets, restaurant and van windows, drinking glasses, etc.).
- \* A secondary vocational education center or a vocational education program that is part of the ongoing high school curriculum can include the assignment of special education support personnel to assist in placement in vocational programs and to provide support for the vocational instructors

and students. Academic components of the vocational programs may be taught by regular vocational instructors, by special education personnel, or by both. Classes can include both disabled and nondisabled students. Curriculum modifications can be implemented to assist both special education students as well as other students who are having difficulty. Modifications may occur in the curriculum, instructional methods, or materials.

- \* Negotiations can occur with local high school and university vocational education centers to serve secondary and postsecondary age students. Programs in vocational education for moderately disabled students can be integrated into the existing programs. For example, food service skills can be developed in the food service components, horticultural knowledge in the agricultural program, car cleaning in the auto repair section, and laundry skills can be part of a cosmetology program.

#### Community Placements

- \* Employment needs can be "created" or discovered by meeting informally with local civic clubs and business personnel to gather data about community service needs. For example, a "need" for sets of glasses, decorated with families' initials and clubs' insignia was created by one special education director. An inexpensive paragraver (a dental drill modified for easy use by the disabled) was purchased, and a job was created.
- \* Small high schools with limited access vocational centers or programs can hire a faculty member in the area of career and vocational education. Courses in career education, career exploration, and prevocational skills can be taught during the freshman and sophomore years. These activities can constitute half of the teaching assignment. The other half can be spent as coordinator of a work study program. At the beginning of the junior year, students can identify their vocational interests, and the coordinator can find positions for them in the community in which they work for half days. Credit toward graduation can be provided.

## TRANSPORTING STUDENTS TO SERVICES OR SERVICE DELIVERERS TO STUDENTS

### Scheduling

- \* Integrate special education and regular education transportation, whenever possible. This is more economical than two separate systems and facilitates integration. Use buses adapted for wheelchairs. Some community businesses or social clubs will fund this expense, for appropriate publicity.
- \* Carefully schedule students to spend the shortest amount of time possible on a bus so that their instruction time is maximized. Schools in inclement climates may want to consider a school alert monitoring system.
- \* Consider the potential economic benefits of using private cars to transport disabled students (and pay the special liability insurance for transporters).

### Cooperation

- \* Share transportation services with other agencies that transport clients or professionals, e.g., senior citizens, vocational rehabilitation, or other social service agencies and county extension agents have extensive travel routes. Most such agencies already have excellent liability insurance.
- \* Share transportation services with agencies or businesses that are not education or human service oriented (e.g., businesses that offer services to outlying areas).
- \* Identify vehicles making daily trips throughout the local area. Schedule visits and transportation efficiently (e.g., coordinate efforts with social service agencies and other education services; schedule interdisciplinary trips which will reduce the number of trips required and can reduce professional burnout exacerbated by extensive travel).
- \* Use interagency contracts with Headstart programs, local preschools, Red Cross, Title XX family court petitions for transportation for eligible persons, or public transportation systems.
- \* Initiate a transportation broker to connect rides with providers and also to promote new services. The brokerage would not operate any of the transportation itself, but would act as a coordinating agent for existing services.
- \* Formulate a transportation program that depends on partnerships between existing community groups and clubs which volunteer to find and operate the transportation necessary. Churches or civic groups may agree to operate a transportation system. Each community's partnership would depend on different contracts and responsibilities. Businesses may be called on to furnish initial equipment and funds.

### Volunteers

- \* Use civic clubs and individual volunteers to provide transportation (e.g., private pilots needing to log hours, CB radio clubs, Welcome Wagon members, civic groups, volunteers for community action, Green Thumb, aging groups).
- \* Use parent-formed transportation committees and babysitting groups to provide transportation.
- \* Have parents transport students and then stay to participate in school activities and therapy.

### Cost Efficiency

- \* Try clustering students in a satellite center close to home or services.
- \* Be careful when scheduling so as much can be done in one day/visit as possible.
- \* Hire specialists, when possible, who live near remote homes.
- \* Provide multiple services in one center so students don't have to travel from a central location.
- \* Use less expensive vehicles when possible (e.g., reimburse parents or staff for private auto use when the numbers of people to be transported are small, or use staff vehicles and carpools).
- \* Rotate, as practical, transportation of staff vs. students.
- \* Travel costs can be cut significantly when visitors can stay with the families of students with disabilities. This also provides the itinerant staff a better view of the abilities and stresses of the family. This personalization can also inhibit professional burnout.

### Mobile Instruction

- \* Use student transportation time as instructional time, e.g., some districts equip buses with tape decks and individual headsets. Lessons are played for different ability levels. Tapes can be updated regularly by teachers or commercial sources. Some teachers assign realistic work to be accomplished during long travel time required to reach specialists.
- \* Mobile vans are frequently less expensive than operation of center-based services. Some rural districts have collaboratively financed mobile units containing teacher and commercially generated materials. Mobile units are especially effective for early intervention, specialized resources, and specialized areas that should be covered in secondary education.
- \* Travel of itinerant personnel who cover isolated rural areas is frequently less expensive than student travel. This option should be considered.

## Technology

- \* The "down time" of professional travel, exacerbated by geographic and climatic difficulties, can be enhanced by the use of portable tape recorders, dictaphones, or eight-track tape players to audit formal or informal inservice tapes recorded by individual professionals, districts, intermediate state education agencies, or commercial firms. Itinerants may also use such equipment for recording case reports or materials for "teacher information/inservice exchanges." Topographical maps can be used for planning alternate routes in inclement weather.
- \* Substitute technological alternatives to travel. Audio-conferencing is a useful tool. Many assessments, instruction, and services traditionally requiring actual person to person contact can be accomplished via the use of satellite, two-way television, electronic mail, etc. Such methods can also reduce the need for travel for staff consultations. Telecommunications can bring home instruction to parents, preschool children, or home-bound students in remote and isolated areas. A minicomputer control system can serve a large number of families simultaneously. One CB radio can serve several families or an entire isolated community.
- \* Television programs can be specially produced at local district, intermediate education unit, or state education agency levels for use in the homes of those with disabilities or as instructional tools in school.

## SUPPLEMENTING INADEQUATE NUMBERS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PERSONNEL

### Role Changes

- \* Short- or long-term role changes can be beneficial. E.g., special educators can be assigned part time as resources for regular educators attempting to work with mainstreamed students with disabilities. The long-term goal is for regular educators to be trained to accept the primary responsibility for serving students with disabilities. When regular educators increase their skills in working with such students, the total staffing of school programs and opportunities for students will be improved.
- \* Many rural districts have assigned their special education administrators as part-time resource personnel for regular educators. This has been successful in districts having no funds for resource teachers but able to use "mobile personnel" to serve as rural crisis teachers. For example, one of the tasks of principals is to monitor activities in the building. They can be trained to act as temporary crisis personnel. Central office and other school personnel such as counselors, who are paid to work full time days but have "down time" can be carefully screened and trained as crisis personnel. Bus drivers, secretaries, and cafeteria workers can be successfully used in such capacities.
- \* Resource teachers can also occasionally function in this capacity. This can be especially effective because special needs students usually identify positively with such teachers. Other successful innovations can include short-term exchanges between the speech therapist and drama teacher and assigning a math teacher as a recorder for precision teaching approaches. An unplanned "by-product" of this approach can be increased understanding and commitment to school goals for special needs students. Because of the efficiency of the rural grapevines, this understanding and commitment will be carried to other school personnel.

### Staff Sharing

- \* Use of itinerant staff shared by two or more districts can allow a district's limited funds to stretch further. Astute administrators recognize the unique professional frustrations and potential for "burnout" of itinerant staff and offer administrative support. A long-term plan for efficient use of itinerant staff is to attempt to "work themselves out of a job," by training others to work with students, providing direct services only when essential to implementation of the child's IEP or to demonstrate a particular teaching method or therapeutic strategy. Local districts sometimes have multiple resources of this type--those of the district, its state education agency, any regional or intermediate education agency consultants, and a cooperative to which the district may belong.
- \* Share personnel with comprehensive care centers, senior citizen agencies, hospitals, neighboring schools (via cooperatives or not), county extension agencies, vocational rehabilitation, social service, state education agencies, MMR and developmental disabilities facilities, home health agencies, etc. Collaborate for evaluations and specialized interventions such as physical, occupational, or speech therapy.

### Local Professionals

- \* Use vacationing or visiting specialists to conduct short- or long-term educational sessions or therapy.
- \* Therapists and other specialized personnel sometimes have unscheduled hours available for service delivery. In many rural districts, even though students needing services are external to the age range requirements of the service provider, therapists are willing to serve them in their unscheduled time. Many rural districts have served infants, toddlers, and other preschoolers this way.
- \* County extension agents consider community service a major responsibility and are generally very receptive to adding specific responsibilities related to serving clients with disabilities.

### Alternate Sources of Personnel

- \* Retired teachers.
- \* Unemployed teachers.
- \* Well-trained volunteers.
- \* Parents as trainers, in home-based or classroom programs.
- \* Temporary teacher exchanges.
- \* Peer tutoring (Districts fortunate enough to have one or more teacher consultants can assign such personnel to train peers.).
- \* Peer aides (may be responsible for carrying books, taking notes or providing other assistance).
- \* High school students enrolled in child development/home economics classes or interested in students with disabilities (e.g., some rural schools have offered course credit when such students have engaged in semester-long work, assisted with follow-up to physical or occupational therapy, or assisted with feeding, physical education, etc.). One rural district in New Hampshire introduced an element of competition which allowed it to achieve additional quality control. Each interested high school student was interviewed by the special educator and had to pass a trial time in the classroom. During the trial time, the high school student wrote behavioral objectives for himself/ herself. The high school student then assumed responsibility for managing specific academic and behavioral programs for a handicapped student. Each participating high school student received credit toward graduation with performance evaluation based on the previously established behavioral objectives.
- \* Student volunteers who provide assistance to the special educator, aide, or disabled student. This can occur during study halls, lunch breaks, etc.
- \* Siblings and extended family members.

- \* Paraprofessionals (paid and nonpaid). For example, in the Tutor Companion Program of Florida, paraprofessional aides have been trained to provide mobility and instruction to deaf-blind students in the least restrictive environment (which ranges from home settings to regular classrooms). The paraprofessionals have been trained to provide one-on-one programming and to accompany the child to class. The paraprofessionals provide instruction under the guidance of the classroom teacher.
- \* University student interns or practicum students.
- \* Off-duty bus drivers, cafeteria workers, etc.
- \* Aides funded by CETA or other potential manpower sources located in rural governments.
- \* Use of existing rural message carriers to communicate with or carry messages to rural parents who live far from schools (e.g., utility meter readers, mail carriers, etc.).
- \* Specialized instruction via educational satellite sending didactic instruction, two-way television, etc.
- \* VISTA volunteers.

#### Securing and Retaining

Survey potential volunteers regarding their (1) skill areas, (2) other resources such as time, and (3) preferences regarding how they would best offer their resources (offering options ranging from formal classroom presentations to field trips).

This process results in a data bank which includes information from certified, retired, and/or unemployed teachers who can provide a variety of resources such as (1) assisting with individual student problems, (2) legally substituting for the regular teacher who can then observe a master teacher demonstrate a particular technique, design materials, engage in another staff development activity, or work with an individual student, or (3) demonstrating effective practices for the regular teacher.

Retired teachers typically respond eagerly to this approach which allows them to remain involved, according to their own time priorities, in a field to which they remain committed. Unemployed teachers also usually respond

positively to involvement which can be readily documented for future employment applications. Senior citizens are a valuable resource and generally have a high level of interest in young people and relatively flexible time schedules. Their involvement is also consistent with the fact that most rural communities have a large number of elderly residents.

Whenever possible, community members who can serve as role models of successful individuals who have disabilities should be used as volunteers.

It is best if a specific school staff member is accountable for coordinating scheduling and securing documentation of volunteer assistance. (this person may be a secretary). Periodic reports should be submitted by individual teachers coordinating their own volunteers. This allows the district to communicate with the community regarding the effectiveness of this process, thus continuing to enhance school-community relations.

## STAFFING MODELS

- \* To improve student medical records, services, and to maintain up-to-date immunizations, hire a health care coordinator. This position could be funded in collaboration with another district or social service agency, or the time of a registered nurse from a local hospital could be contracted. This person should be responsible for establishing records on identified low-incidence special education students. Initial information could be obtained from parents via home visits, follow up questionnaires, and cooperation with local health care and social service agencies. This person's responsibilities should include parent permission for school immunization, physician and parent permission for administering medication at school, and ascertainment of specific health problems such as epilepsy. Requisite to the health care program should be monthly contact between the health care coordinator and registered nurse and the parents, teachers, support staff, and involved volunteers. Individual conferences should occur during lunch and planning breaks at the teacher's school. Contact should be maintained with parents via mail and telephone.
- \* Obtain prescriptive programs provided by the appropriate therapist for use by teachers and/or parents for implementation in the local school or at home.
- \* Employ a developmental counselor for children, K-6, who are experiencing adjustment problems. This person should be responsible for working with regular classroom teachers in the development of behavior management programs for individual children. In addition, the developmental counselor is responsible for individual or group counseling for children experiencing adjustment problems.
- \* Train paraprofessionals, teacher aides, high school students, community volunteers, or others to assist with service delivery follow up.
- \* An aide can be employed to work on a one-on-one basis with a multi-handicapped child, under the supervision of a special education teacher. Speech, occupational and physical therapy can be obtained at a lower cost or no cost by affiliating with a special education cooperative. The cooperative and local school district can request assistance from the State Department of Education for monthly on-site assessment and programming, using staff from the state schools for the deaf and blind. The state staff can provide telephone consulting services. All schedules and personnel can be monitored by the special education cooperative. Adaptive equipment can be purchased by the local school district or donated by local civic clubs.
- \* In very sparsely populated areas, itinerant special education personnel can provide assessments and, with the regular teacher and parents, assist in the development of the individual education program. Regular teachers can then be provided consultation (and training, if necessary) to implement the program. Student progress can be monitored weekly by special education staff and programmatic changes made as appropriate. In cases of some students having more difficult handicaps, an aide may be trained to provide more intense intervention.

- \* Hire, or share with another district, full-time teacher consultants whose job is to assist teachers in making successful adaptations for handicapped students. Regular classroom teachers (or aides) can be with the students when they are mainstreamed. Students, parents, and teacher/aides can receive support services from the consultant, who also periodically monitors teacher and student progress.
- \* A consultant can train teachers to manage the behavior of students more effectively and to train students so that the learning environment has consistent contingencies for behavior. Teachers can be trained on a behaviorally based system which is designed to apply to all students in the classroom. Simultaneously, students in the classroom can be trained to ignore inappropriate behavior (regardless of its origin) and to reinforce appropriate behavior.
- \* A state or intermediate unit can employ regional consultants in vision and hearing who spend two days every two weeks in each rural county. During this time they can assist in the identification of students by assisting the schools in the development of screening programs. They can provide expertise in assessment and serve on the team developing the individualized educational plan. They can provide training for personnel who are assigned specific tasks (e.g., screening procedures or aides to work with students with hearing impairments). They can monitor the student's progress and suggest changes in programming. Recommended educational materials and equipment can be obtained by the local district.

## USE OF ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES

- \* Maintain excellent communication systems between therapists and teachers, parents, and other service providers (e.g., daily service delivery logs and feedback data delivered via telephone answering machines, electronic communication systems, audioconferencing, etc.).
- \* Establish "hotlines" that relay the need for assistance to supplemental service providers. These could take the form of an incoming WATS line, electronic mail, audioconferencing, etc.
- \* Supplement/provide services by satellite, electronic communication systems, exchanges of video or cassette tapes, audioconferencing, or other advanced technologies.
- \* Establish remote electronic practica in which university students and faculty work long distance with public school students and teachers. Co-operative efforts can be made to design individualized curriculum, give instructional feedback, and solve service delivery problems.
- \* Use equipment such as the Kurzweil Reading Machine or the Optacon print reading aid, as supplements to regular classroom instruction.
- \* Use computer-managed instruction (CMI) to administer/evaluate tests, keep records, and make decisions. Use CMI software designed to support the instructional system and provide diagnostic feedback regarding student performance.
- \* Use educational technology to increase rural access to curricular offerings. Amplified telephone systems allow students to hear lectures or hold discussion sessions with remotely located persons. Instructional television, including transmission via cable or special satellite, presents subjects that might otherwise be omitted from the small school curriculum.
- \* Advanced technologies can reduce the need for teacher specialization and permit instructors to spend more of their time teaching basic skills or supervising individualized study. Library materials and searches are accessible through global information and dissemination systems such as the Source or CompuServe. The ACRES Rural Bulletin Board offers rural service delivery strategy information on a daily basis.
- \* Teachers can computerize routine drill, reinforcement, and record keeping. This leaves more time for actual teaching and is especially beneficial for "generic" special educators.
- \* Families having children with similar disabilities can compare service delivery effectiveness, home teaching, and availability of resources via microcomputers connected with global telecommunication systems.
- \* Mobile vans with specialized electronic equipment are becoming more frequent as a way to reach students in remote locations whose school systems lack either full-time teaching specialists or extraordinary equipment. The vans may have a diagnostic and prescriptive focus or carry mobile electronic curricula.

- \* Many students with disabilities are accessing statewide or national telecommunications systems to obtain service or instructional information. Many specialized pupil services, such as vocational guidance and diagnostic and prescriptive services, include mobile electronic curricula.
- \* A student can react to a structured sequence of situations as input for prescriptive programming. The videotapes can be mailed from remote areas to be viewed by central facility or university staff. Their input can be used by local personnel for planning prescriptive programming for the child and for locating agencies which can best provide appropriate service. The tapes become a permanent part of the child's records against which subsequent recordings are compared. Testing the child in a home-school situation eliminates clinical aspects which often affect performance.
- \* Videotapes can be the primary vehicle for training parents of children with low-incidence disabilities. A residential workshop can be offered for remotely located parents and their children, at which time parents view teaching videotapes. Training videotapes can later be sent to the families on a monthly basis for use with their loaned videotape playback units. An auditory trainer can be furnished to parents for use at least once per day on one-to-one language teaching sessions with children, as described in the videotapes. This process reduces the number of staff needed for home visits. A visiting teacher can be sent to each home less frequently and can conduct weekly telephone counseling sessions with parents.
- \* Strategic placement of CB radios is an inexpensive approach to communicating with parents in remote mountain "hollers" that are hard to reach because of their terrain. The excellent natural communication system allows relatively quick access to parents and provides a reliable way to carry messages. More sophisticated "instant" communication systems for service providers and their families use telecommunication.
- \* Homebound students can be served via telecommunications through a telephone hookup in the child's home. This also increases communication between the student and teacher about learning difficulties.
- \* A television placed in the student's home, depending upon the sophistication and resources of the geographical area, can be used to transmit educational programs designed or produced by the state or district. Alternatively, the classroom setting can be broadcast to the home. Broadcasting may occur via one-way audio (didactic) from class to home or two-way audio (interactive instruction).

## COOPERATIVE APPROACHES

- \* Work cooperatively with related service agencies to ensure that the entire family is part of intervention and the child's needs are holistically met (e.g., work with county judges, juvenile court systems, social service workers; train the community to accept children with diverse needs; and work with parents so that intervention is consistent).
- \* When employment of a full-time orientation and mobility specialist is not feasible, cooperatively share the services of an itinerant resource teacher of the visually impaired. This person should provide formal or informal training to classroom teachers and parents. Olson (1978) has published guidelines for implementing orientation and mobility skill training for blind children in rural areas.
- \* Consortia of two or more school districts can provide services to multi-handicapped students. Using centrally located classrooms, multihandicapped students can receive instructional programs from a special education teacher. They can also receive support services from a speech therapist, physical therapist, home-school coordinator, high school work-study student, psychologist, and an itinerant teacher of the deaf. When appropriate, children can join regular classes for physical education, music, and other schoolwide activities. On a weekly basis, consortium personnel can attend information and inservice meetings.
- \* A rural school with limited access to personnel with expertise in the area of hearing impairments can form a local team to assist in the management of educational programs for hearing impaired students. The team should consist of personnel such as regular educators, a resource teacher, speech clinician, and school nurse. The school nurse can provide expertise with regard to health problems while the speech clinician can address the problems in communication and obtain audiological information. The resource teacher can assess educational problems, and an educational plan can be developed. Depending on the plan, any or all of the team may be involved in its implementation.
- \* Cooperative arrangements among school districts can result in comprehensive programming for students with hearing impairments. The program can consist of a home-based program for infants, a center-based program for preschool children, an itinerant teacher serving students in grades K-12, and variations of this concept.

## PERSONNEL RETENTION

- \* Link an "old timer" and a person who was also recruited to the school system from another area with the new special educator whom you are attempting to retain. The team can educate the newcomer concerning local cultural values, expectations, and norms. The individuals can also acquaint him with local power structure and community communication systems relevant to his work.
- \* Place newcomers in leadership positions such as in activities designed to allow them to share their past experiences (Many districts employing this strategy have spotlighted a local leader simultaneously so that established power structures become supportive of the new staff member.).
- \* Initiate temporary faculty exchange programs.
- \* Establish inservice incentive systems including release time, college credit, and certificate renewal.
- \* Provide special challenges or assignments, particularly when affiliated with preservice or inservice programs.
- \* Design clear reward structures for competent staff and promote administrative and peer support. If feasible, establish merit increases, career ladders, and other approaches to recognize extraordinary performance.
- \* Initiate stress reduction activities, particularly for itinerants and employees who are located in remote settings.
- \* Acquaint itinerant staff with alternate uses of the professional "down time" of travel (e.g., listening to educational cassettes, recording reports, varying travel schedules, using technological alternatives for remote service delivery/feedback, or planning interdisciplinary team evaluations).
- \* Encourage local building personnel to accept the itinerant as an ongoing part of their program and understand their unique roles. Local administrators can assist in establishing a local peer support system and making successful contacts with local parents. Temporary role exchanges have been found useful as have interdisciplinary teaming and involving itinerants in local meetings and activities.

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- \* Staff development should include inservice for regular educators and administrators as well as for special educators. All professionals are required for effective service delivery (This is consistent with interdisciplinary teaming.). It is vital that trainees work in building teams with the relevant program coordinator clarifying the missions of itinerant staff.
- \* Staff development must be an ongoing systematic process of confronting problems. Experiences should be as individualized as necessary since the collaborative unit will consistently have new staff and personnel with widely diverse responsibilities. All potential resources should be used ranging from university or community college courses to peer instruction. Because of the remote locations of many school personnel, the use of advanced technologies such as two-way use of educational satellites, exchanges of videodiscs for instruction/feedback, or simpler audiocommunications may be necessary.
- \* Have paraprofessionals accompany disabled students to the regular classrooms and provide support (e.g., assistance in interpreting assignments or designing special materials) to regular teachers.
- \* Use an integrated therapy approach in which therapists (physical, occupational, or speech) work cooperatively with teachers regarding the implementation of a specific child's IEP.
- \* Employ a teacher consultant model in which special educators consult with regular educators regarding materials development and other aspects of implementing IEPs.
- \* Use the ACRES Resource Network to provide peer support for rural special educators who work in remote areas and to identify additional resources that can be used in your rural school system.

## INCREASING FUNDING FOR PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

### Available School Resources

- \* Use school vocational and shop classes or clubs to build ramps, classroom adaptive equipment, and materials needed for curriculum modification.
- \* Prevail upon the school custodians to make equipment with scrap materials during their "down time."

### Volunteers

- \* Appeal to local volunteer organizations and civic groups (Welcome Wagons; Grange; Veterans of Foreign Wars; Lions, Rotary, and Eagles clubs; etc.) and churches for assistance. Some organizations would rather donate money than time. The important thing is to carefully identify all potential resources and gather all possible support for the special education program.
- \* Advocacy groups for individuals with disabilities are particularly valuable resources for rural schools. Many Associations for Retarded Citizens (ARCs) and other groups will host events to raise funds for specific equipment needs.

### Cooperative Funding

- \* Share existing resources of local agencies and businesses. For example, most businesses and social service centers use their computer facilities less than a full day. Rural schools across the country are finding that these agencies are generally willing to share computer time because of the positive "P.R." and tax deductions they may gain.

### Donations

- \* Secure business donations. Many businesses will not secure as much money or trade-in value when they update microcomputer or other equipment as they would acquire in community P.R. or tax deductions, by donating such to the local schools. The schools may benefit considerably by informally and formally publicizing their equipment needs.
- \* Many rural school districts have found that county roads supervisors can be helpful in securing money and equipment.

### Communication

- \* Radio stations can be of invaluable assistance in appealing for community contributions and assistance to the schools. Radio stations are required to donate a certain amount of air time for public service announcements. \*Unlike urban newspapers, rural papers typically search for newsworthy events. Special educators and administrators should develop positive relationships with reporters and the local editor and furnish information for positive stories about the special education program.

## Technology

- \* Technological alternatives should be considered such as IEP and curriculum planning resources (e.g., Super Planner) and satellite and two-way television communication.
- \* Technological systems of identifying resources are rapidly increasing and include the "Rural" Bulletin Board operated by the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES). This electronic bulletin board can be used by any rural district or other agency having access to SpecialNet, an electronic communications system operated by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE).

## ENHANCING PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### Social Ties

- \* Rural parents frequently are reticent to become involved with the "authority figures" of the school, regarding their child's program. Thus, it is essential that special educators (and administrators) establish a positive rapport with parents. It is usually easier to do this via a one-on-one discussion between special educators and parents regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the child's performance. It is frequently useful to precede such a discussion with a social contact. In fact, many rural districts host non-threatening social events or meetings preceded by a meal. Free babysitting is also an established part of such events in several rural districts in Arizona, and parent willingness to share valuable information with the schools and to follow up educational instruction within the home setting have dramatically increased.
- \* Special educators who become respected community members have the most success with parents becoming actively involved with the special education program. Even itinerant staff who only visit a community once a month can express a sincere interest in community events and problems. This is especially true if they talk with the key communicators in the community.
- \* Home visits, after sufficient rapport has been established, are invaluable. Typically, itinerant staff, rural interns, or practicum students who accept invitations to visit or stay in students' homes while traveling learn a great deal about the real strengths and stresses of the family and generate the most success for the special education program. Because of this, many districts plan mobile instructional vans traveling through isolated regions with sparse populations of low-incidence handicapped conditions. Generally, this also increases the commitment of the professional.

### Non-School Personnel

- \* Discussion/support groups led by parents are much more successful than those led by professionals. Rural districts in Maine found that a public service announcement made by a parent stating that he was not affiliated with the school and would like to visit with and possibly assist other parents was particularly successful. The parent groups originally met on their own and later became an integral part of the schools' feedback system.
- \* Messages can be sent to isolated rural communities via persons who frequent such areas on a regular basis (e.g., mail carriers, utility meter readers).
- \* School personnel should work cooperatively with other agencies who visit families or provide services to those with disabilities (e.g., county demonstration or home health agents).
- \* Arrange meetings of parent groups with diverse foci and encourage them to share personal achievements/ideas and occasionally have joint projects. Joint advocacy projects are more effective than those of single parent groups.

- \* Inform local physicians which parents are willing to meet with other parents who are just learning that their children have disabilities. It is extremely helpful for parents newly experiencing emotions such as shock, grief, and hostility to have a parent near who understands these emotions. This is a particularly effective strategy in rural areas where parents (and sometimes physicians) know which families have children with disabilities.
- \* Educate local physicians regarding the needs of parents of disabled children and community resources that are available to them.

#### Family

- \* The involvement of siblings and extended family members is an asset. This practice also frequently encourages reticent parents to become involved.
- \* Involve families in designing unique special education strategies (e.g., rural orientation and mobility markers).

#### Technology

- \* Technological devices can be as simple as a CB radio (capable of serving several families in clustered rural areas) or a telephone answering machine. Answering machines offer parents options of listening, at their convenience, to student progress reports and appeals for instructional assistance at home.
- \* Prepared teaching materials to be taught by parents can be coordinated with television broadcasts or telecommunication systems and supplemented by mobile vans or itinerant staff visits.
- \* Videotapes or cassette tapes can be mailed to parents for instructional use or educators for critique regarding a student's progress. Teacher visits and/or counseling via telephone, audioconferencing, or teleconferencing can be supplemental.
- \* Encourage families to use the "Green Thumb Network" menu of CompuServe regarding potential services of County Extension Agencies. Parents with computers could take advantage of this service.

#### Parent/Community Communications

- \* "Communication books" designed by teachers, can be sent home with children on a daily or periodic basis. Such books offer advice for at-home follow-up reports of progress, etc., and can be responded to by parents.
- \* School newsletters (even a one-page mimeographed sheet) should contain articles or suggestions made by parents and recognition that parent support is crucial for effective programming.

#### Public Relations

- \* The local newspaper should be provided with material for articles regarding the importance of parent involvement and some examples of successful strategies.

- \* Public service announcements should occur on radio stations. These should emphasize parent rights and responsibilities.
- \* School personnel should volunteer to speak at church and civic groups regarding special education program concepts and methodologies. Special education program information should be distributed at county fairs, craft shows, scouting events, etc. This will help build understanding of the potential of students with disabilities and support for their families.  
\*It is sometimes necessary for school personnel to formally or informally acquaint local factory managers with the need for parents of students with disabilities to be present for school meetings.